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THE MERRY MERRY CUCKOO: THE
DEACON'S HAT: WELSH HONEYMOON

THREE WELSH PLAYS

THE MERRY MERRY CUCKOO
THE DEACON'S HAT
WELSH HONEYMOON

BY
JEANNETTE MARKS



BOSTON
LITTLE, BROWN, AND COMPANY
1917

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THESE THREE PLAYS
ARE DEDICATED TO
THE WELSH NATIONAL THEATRE
Calon wrth Galon

PREFACE

POETRY" and "song" are words which convey, better than any other two words could, the priceless gifts of the Welsh people to the world. With their love for music, for beauty, for the significance of their land and its folklore, their inherent romance in the difficult art of living, they have transformed ugliness into beauty, turned loneliness into speech, and ever recalled life to its only permanent possessions in wonder and romance.

Curiously enough, the Welsh, rich in poetry and in music, have been almost altogether devoid of plays. But no one who has read those first Welsh tales in the "Mabinogion" (c. 1260) could for an instant think the Cymru devoid of the dramatic instinct. The Welsh way of interpreting experience is essentially dramatic. *The Dream of Maxen Wledig*, *The Dream of Rhonabwy*, both from the "Mabinogion," are sharply dramatic, although then and later Welsh literature remained practically devoid of the play form. Experience dramatized is, too, that Pilgrim's Progress of Gwalia: "Y Bardd Cwsg" (1703).

Every gift of the Welsh would seem to promise the realization some day of a great national drama, for they have not only the gift of poetry and the power to seize the symbol — short cut through experience —

which can, even as the crutch of Ibsen's little Eyolf, lift a play into greatness; they have, also, natures profoundly emotional and yet intellectually critical. They are, humanly speaking, perfect tools for the achievement of great drama. But it is a drab journey from those "Mabinogion" days of wonder, coarse and crude as they were in many ways, yet intensely vital, through the "Bardd Cwsg" to Twm o'r Nant (1739-1810) the so-called "Welsh Shakespeare," whose Interludes might, with sufficient worrying, afford delectation to the rock-ribbed Puritanism which has stood, as much as any other oppression, in the way of Gwalia's full development of her genius for beauty.

It was, then, a significant moment when "The Welsh National Theatre" came into existence with so powerful a patron as Lord Howard de Walden, lessee of the Haymarket, and Owen Rhoscomyl (Captain Owen Vaughan) and other gifted Welsh literati for its sponsors. And it did not seem an insignificant moment to one person when the playwright of *The Merry Merry Cuckoo* and *Welsh Honeymoon* learned through her friendly agent, Curtis Brown of London, that she had received one of the Welsh National Theatre's first prizes (1911).

These plays have been given in many places: The Little Theatre in Minneapolis, the Fifth Avenue Theatre in New York, the Toy Theatre in Boston, and by various branches of the American Drama Society, whose President, Charlotte Porter, and Vice President, Mrs. Marks (Josephine Preston Peabody), have been warm friends to my Welsh plays. They have been presented in several colleges and by various clubs and

are in demand among Schools of Expression and in college classrooms. The author has read them before clubs and societies. Enthusiasm for *The Merry Merry Cuckoo* led Luther B. Anthony, Editor of the *Dramatist*, to reprint it in his original and widely known magazine. Two of the plays have appeared elsewhere, *The Merry Merry Cuckoo* in the *Metropolitan* and *Welsh Honeymoon* in *Smart Set*. Acknowledgment would not be complete without reference to one whose unfailing appreciation, also, for *The Merry Merry Cuckoo* has been a constant inspiration — Doctor Richard Burton, Ex-President of the Drama League of America.

JEANNETTE MARKS

ATTIC PEACE

SOUTH HADLEY, MASSACHUSETTS.

November 24, 1916.

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PRONUNCIATION OF WELSH NAMES

- 1 *ch* has, roughly, the same sound as in German or in the Scotch *loch*.
- 2 *dd* = English *th*, roughly, in *breathe*.
- 3 *e* has, roughly, the sound of *ai* in *dairy*.
- 4 *f* = English *v*.
- 5 *ff* = English sharp *f*.
- 6 *ll* represents a sound intermediate between *the* and *fl*.
- 7 *w* as a consonant is pronounced as in English; as a vowel = *oo*.
- 8 *y* is sometimes like *u* in *but*, sometimes like *ee* in *green*.

NOTE: *The author will gladly answer questions about pronunciation, costuming, etc., etc.*

THE MERRY MERRY CUCKOO

CHARACTERS

ANNIE, the wife of David.

DAVID.

LOWRY PRICHARD }
GUTO PRICHARD } two neighbors.

MORRIS, a young minister.

ACT I

A garden. Cottage at back running from right to center. A group of three windows in the shape of a bay, showing a bed inside and an old man lying on it. A door leads into cottage. A gate in fence on the right side leads to the road and village beyond. All of the left side of stage a garden and orchard, with a path through it to a gate in wall at back; garden wall to left, at back over it village chapel from which the church music comes.

A thatched cottage with whitewashed walls. Ivy is growing about the doorway, and hanging from the thatch above the door; fuchsia bushes on either side of door; trees to the left in garden, including holly and yew; green grass; mountains beyond cottage and garden and chapel. In the foreground, to right by cottage door, is a washtub.

It is about six o'clock, the first Monday in April. Towards end of act the sun sets.

At rise of curtain, windows of the cottage closed, and Annie, old, very plump, with sparse gray hair escaping from under her white cap and damp on her forehead from work, and wearing a short skirt, apron, fichu over shoulders, clogs on her feet, is washing. Church music off left continues a minute after rise of curtain. David calls out. Annie leaves the tub and hurries to the windows to open them from the outside. David, a very old man, with white hair and thin face, is seen lying in bed.

DAVID (calling)

Annie, Annie!

ANNIE (*opening windows*)

Aye, lad dear, I was listenin' for ye; yiss, yiss, an' expectin' ye to call.

DAVID (*sleepily*)

I was dreamin' an' — dear, dear, what a dream! It seemed like fifty years ago when we were married, an', you remember, we stood out there in the garden that first night. Are there any violets bloomin' yet?

ANNIE

Not yet, Davy lad.

DAVID

An' the marsh marigolds?

ANNIE

I'm thinkin' they're sure to be out.

DAVID

An' that same night, Annie, do ye remember we heard the cuckoo singin'?

ANNIE

Aye, lad darlin', fifty years ago this comin' week, an' a cuckoo singin' to us every spring since then. (*Annie takes a tumbler from the sill and gives him a spoonful of medicine*) Take this, dear; there, 'twill be makin' ye better.

DAVID (*taking medicine*)

An' well?

ANNIE

Yiss, yiss, better.

DAVID

But the cuckoo, will the cuckoo be singin' soon?

ANNIE (*words inconclusive*)

Lad, dear, no more, or ye'll be havin' an attack an' — Dear people, chapel is out, an' I hear them on the road!

DAVID (*plaintively*)

The Monday meetin'. Why have ye not been?

ANNIE

Work is keepin' me home, lad.

DAVID

But, Annie, ye've not said a word of the cuckoo.

ANNIE (*sending her voice up as cheerfully as she can*)

Aye, the cuckoo; yiss, the cuckoo —

DAVID (*clasping and unclasping his hands*)

Has it come? Did ye hear it?

ANNIE (*gulping*)

David, dear, if ye'd but listen to what I was a-goin' to say. I was a-goin' to say that I've not heard the cuckoo yet, but that everythin's over-early this spring in Wales, an' I'm expectin' to hear one any time now. 'Tis so warm there might be one singin' at dusk to-day — there might be!

DAVID (*brightening*)

Might there be, Annie?

ANNIE (*smoothing his head with her hand*)

Aye, lad. Hush, lad, they're singin' in the chapel!

[*She stands there with one hand resting on his forehead, listening to the singing of Penlan, a hymn by David Jenkins. When the music stops, she moves away.*]

DAVID

Tis over-early, an', Annie —

ANNIE

Davy dear, be still! Pastor Morris says — Tut, tut, I'll close the window, for there comes that Lowry Prichard and her man.

[*Annie closes windows hastily and goes back to her washing. Enter from right Lowry and her husband*]

Guto, coming from the Monday prayer meeting and carrying hymnals. Lowry dressed in Welsh costume, clogs, short full skirt, striped apron, white sleeves from elbow to wrist, tight bodice, shawl over her shoulders, white cap, and tall, Welsh beaver hat. Guto, Welsh beaver hat on like his wife's, striped vest, brass buttons on lapels of black cloth coat, long, somewhat tight trousers. At sight of washtub and Annie busy over it, Lowry and Guto make gestures of shocked dismay to each other.

LOWRY

Good evenin', Annie Dalben.

ANNIE (*wiping her wet hand on her apron*)

Good evenin', Lowry Prichard, an' to you, Guto.

GUTO

Good evenin', mum.

LOWRY

How is your man?

ANNIE

He's no better.

LOWRY

Is he worse?

ANNIE

Nay.

LOWRY

We missed ye, Annie Dalben.

GUTO

Aye, we did. Why were ye not at meetin'?

ANNIE

I've my man to mind these days.

LOWRY (*triumphantly*)

But ye said he was no worse, ye did.

ANNIE

Aye, I did, but I cannot leave him alone.

GUTO

But ye're neglectin' chapel an' forgettin' the Lord, Annie Dalben. Ye'll go quite on the downfall, like this.

LOWRY

Aye, ye've not been to meetin's, an' 'tis bad when he's dyin' for ye to forget your Lord. Is he in there?

ANNIE (*moving protectingly nearer the closed window*)

Yiss.

LOWRY

Why were ye washin'?

ANNIE

Ye've no cause to ask that — ye know. Except I did the washin', what would there be for me to care for David with — now that he needs me?

GUTO

Yiss, but ye could do it on some other day.

ANNIE

Nay, for the ladies are waitin' now for what they've given me to do — an' they so kind.

LOWRY

I see Pastor Morris comin' in.

ANNIE

Aye, he's comin' every day an' some days bringin' me the food from his own table for my man.

[*Enter Pastor Morris, young, earnest and rather severe because of his youth.*]

LOWRY (*the inquisitorial look on her face deepening, and her voice growing more shrill, pointing to Annie*)

Ye see, sir, what Annie Dalben's been doin' while

we were in meetin.' She's needin' a sermon, aye, that she is.

GUTO

She's goin' quite on the downfall, sir.

ANNIE

Lowry Prichard, ye've no cause to speak so about me. When was I ever absent when my man was well? But now, sir, (*turning to Morris*) as ye know, he's ill an' needin' me an' all the s'illin's I can earn. I cannot go away from him.

LOWRY (*speaking to Pastor Morris*)

She's needin' your advice, sir. 'Tis that she is needin' whatever. Warn her well.

GUTO

Yiss, an' rebuke her.

LOWRY

Ye're young, sir, but ye're the instrument of the Lord whatever. 'Tis your duty to bring her back to her conscience.

GUTO

Amen.

[*Lowry and Guto go off very self-righteous and looking triumphantly at Annie, who, quiet, her face pale and weary, turns to her washing and rubs and rinses diligently while the minister is talking.*]

MORRIS (*gently*)

I've been troubled, for I knew that it would come to this, Annie. I should have spoken with you before about going to chapel. Some one could be found to stay with David while you were at meeting. You have not been to chapel for a month, Annie.

ANNIE (*continuing her work but in her voice the attitude of the older woman towards the young man*)

Ye're very kind, sir, to take the interest, but I'm thinkin' ye cannot understand. There's been no occasion, sir, for ye to understand through what I've been goin' these days.

[*She rubs her sleeve across her tear-filled eyes and continues washing sturdily.*]

MORRIS

Yes, but, Annie, what is David thinking? Does he want you to stay away from the meetings where you have always been together?

ANNIE

Nay, sir.

MORRIS

Has he spoken of your staying away?

ANNIE (*reluctantly*)

Aye, sir, he asked this evenin' why I was not in meetin'.

MORRIS (*reflectively*)

He did. Well, I am thinking that —

ANNIE (*dropping her work and speaking as if worried*)

Nay, sir, I've no cause to excuse myself to ye — ye're naught but a lad. 'Tis past your knowledge how my man is everythin' to me — everythin', he is. He's been such a husband as no one but myself can know, thinkin' of me all the time, livin' for me, as gentle an' tender to me as if I had been a child, an' now, sir, he's ill — he may be dyin', an' I can think of nothin' but doin' everythin' for — (*David taps on window and Annie turns to open it*) Aye, lad dear. 'Tis the Pastor comin' to see ye again.

DAVID (*smiling and holding out one weak old hand*)
Good evenin', sir, such a grand day, with spring everywhere. We've been expectin' the cuckoo, sir — the wife and I. Have ye heard the cuckoo, yet, Annie?

MORRIS (*starting to speak*)
'Twill be a fortnight be—

ANNIE (*interrupting hurriedly*)
Nay, lad dear, I've been busy, but I'm thinkin' I'm likely to hear it now any moment — aye, any moment.

MORRIS
But, Annie, the cuckoo doesn't —

ANNIE
Tut, sir, I could almost promise the cuckoo would be singin' at sundown whatever — aye, indeed, lad darlin'. Now I'll —

DAVID (*interrupting*)
Annie, ye mind that baby cuckoo we saw the skylark a-feedin' that first spring in Blaen Cwm? It all comes back so clear now an' clearer every moment. I'd not once thought of it, sir, since then.

MORRIS
But, David, the —

ANNIE (*speaking to David and closing the windows*)
Lie down, lad darlin', an' be quiet. I'll call ye, if the cuckoo sings.
[*In the distance the choir can be heard practising Cariatid, a revival hymn, in the chapel. Continues until Annie is alone and talking to herself.*]

MORRIS (*severely*)
But, Annie, you know the cuckoo will not sing at

least for another fortnight. It is mid-April before the cuckoo sings.

ANNIE (*wearily*)

Aye, sir.

MORRIS

Why did you say that to David?

ANNIE

He's achin', sir, to hear the cuckoo sing, an' I'm wantin' to comfort him.

MORRIS

But, Annie, it is a lie to say what you did to him.

ANNIE (*vigorously*)

Aye, sir, but I'm not carin' whatever.

MORRIS (*severely*)

Not caring about telling a lie?

ANNIE

Nay, sir, I'm not carin' about anythin' but makin' him happy.

MORRIS (*rebukingly*)

Annie! (*Annie continues washing and does not reply*)

Annie! Well, indeed, Annie, if there is nothing I can do for you, and you will not listen to me, I must be going to choir practice. I promised to be there this evening.

ANNIE (*without turning from the tub*)

Aye, sir. (*Pastor Morris off through garden path to choir practice. Goes to left. Annie continues washing until he is well out of sight. She stands up straight and looks about the garden*) He's wantin' to hear the cuckoo more nor anythin' else, dear, dear! Every-where 'tis green now, an' the lilies will be here before

long — but lad, lad, the cuckoo, will it come? (*She goes to left into garden, the wet clothes in a basket under her arm, and stands there, looking about*) 'Twas over there it laid its egg in the robin's nest this year ago in May — aye, an' one poor little bird pushed the other out, an' ye picked it up, lad dear, an' were so tender with it. An' they're not wantin' ye, Davy, my old lad darlin', to think the cuckoo will be singin' soon. Dear God, is there to be no cuckoo singin' for the lad again? Just once more, dear God, to sing to him and comfort him? Aye! just the one song? No cuckoo? Aye, there will be a cuckoo singin', there shall be a cuckoo singin'! (*She looks towards the closed windows behind which David lies, and puts down her basket of clothes*) He's asleep! Hush, I'll be the cuckoo! He'll wake an' think the spring has really come. Here by this tree. They're in the chapel, an' they'll never know. (*Throughout this scene, until Lowry speaks, a cuckoo song is being played very softly. And it is into a few notes of this, several times repeated, that Annie swings when she actually sings her cuckoo song. She opens her mouth to begin, a look of appealing misery on her face*) 'Twas somethin' like this: Coo-o. Coo-o! Tut, that sounds like a hen. I know, it goes over an' over again, sing-song, sing-song, like this: cu-cu, cu-cu. Aye, that's better. (*She rocks herself backwards and forwards practising it and repeating cu-cu, cu-cu*) 'Tis growin' better, but lad, lad, I'm plannin' to deceive ye whatever! (*Brushes tears away impatiently and begins song again*) Cucu-cu, cucu-cu, cucucu-cu, cu! Aye, that's fair; aye, 'tis fine! He'll not know me from a

real cuckoo. I'll try it loud now, for ye've no long, dearie.

[She holds eagerly on to tree beside her, so lost in the cuckoo music that she is not aware of a head popping up behind the garden wall and down again. She draws a long breath and begins, softly, slowly, the song sounding as if it came from a distance. She waits a moment, — the heads are well above the wall now in amazement, — and then sings more loudly, making the song sound as if it came from the garden where she is standing.]

DAVID (*calling*)

Annie!

ANNIE (*hurrying to open his windows*)

Aye, lad dear, I'm comin'.

DAVID (*ecstatically*)

Annie, Annie, dear, I heard the cuckoo singin'; I was dreamin' again, an' all at once I heard the cuckoo singin' in the garden, loud and clear. It sang three times; first, it sounded like somethin' else, 'twas so breathless; then it sang quiet an' sweet like a cuckoo; an' the third time it seemed comin' from the old mill wheel.

ANNIE

But, lad darlin', ye've heard it, an' I'm that glad! Three times; yiss, yiss, 'tis a real fine cuckoo. Now ye're happy, darlin', an' ye'll sleep well upon it.

DAVID (*disappointedlly*)

Did ye no hear it?

ANNIE

I'm thinkin' I did an' thinkin' I didn't.

DAVID

Where were ye?

ANNIE

Out in the garden, hangin' out the clothes.

DAVID (*still more disappointedly*)

An' ye didn't hear it?

ANNIE

I'm no certain, darlin'; I heard somethin' — I did, indeed.

DAVID (*proudly*)

'Twas the cuckoo, Annie dear; I'm hearin' it first every year; ye must be growin' deaf.

ANNIE

Yiss, yiss. Now go to sleep, an' I'll call ye if I hear the cuckoo sing.

DAVID

Will it sing again?

ANNIE

Aye, darlin', if ye heard it once, 'tis sure to sing again.

DAVID

I'll be gettin' well, Annie, is it not so?

ANNIE (*turning away suddenly*)

Indeed, lad dear, ye'll be about among the heather 'fore long.

DAVID (*speaking quietly, almost to himself*)

To think the cuckoo's singin' — singin' for me!

ANNIE

Aye, aye; now go to sleep.

[*He lies back and closes his eyes obediently. Annie, drying her eyes on her apron, goes to left towards her basket of clothes. She stands by the tree where she had sung the cuckoo song for David, unconscious that two people are head and shoulders above the garden wall, looking at her.*]

LOWRY (*in a loud voice*)

So ye've come back, Annie Dalben, to sing the cuckoo again.

GUTO

Aye, we heard ye singin' the cuckoo.

LOWRY

Pooh, 'tis a pretty cuckoo ye make, an old woman like you, an' a pretty song!

ANNIE

Lowry Prichard, have a care!

GUTO

'Tis over-early for the cuckoo, is it not?

ANNIE

Yiss.

GUTO

An' what are ye singin' in your garden for, an' David dyin'?

[*Annie does not reply but stoops to her basket of clothes and begins to hang them out.*]

LOWRY

So ye'll give no answer? Well, indeed, maybe ye'll answer Pastor Morris. Aye, Guto, go fetch the Pastor.

[*Guto goes off to left, through garden gate in garden wall.*]

LOWRY (*going towards the windows behind which David lies*)

'Tis a godly song ye've sung, Annie, an' a tale for the chapel, eh?

ANNIE (*following and stepping in front of Lowry*)

Ye may go out of this garden, an' that this minute!

LOWRY (*making her way nearer and nearer the window*)

Nay, nay, I'm a-goin' to speak with David an' tell him he's a cuckoo for a wife. Tut, ye look fair crazy, Annie, crazy with wrath! Your hair is all rumpled, an' your smock is dirty. David, bein' a cuckoo is —
[*But the taunt is left unfinished, for at that moment young Morris comes in hastily, Guto following.*]

MORRIS (*authoritatively*)

Annie! Lowry! Annie, is this I hear true? Have you been imitating the cuckoo?

ANNIE

Aye, sir.

MORRIS (*turning to Lowry and Guto*)

You may go. Leave this to me.

[*Guto and Lowry go off right, through front gate, starting in at David as they pass.*]

MORRIS (*sternly*)

So, Annie, you have been acting the cuckoo — acting a lie. With this lie upon you, how will it be with salvation?

ANNIE (*hotly*)

Salvation, sir? I've no mind to your salvation; no, nor to heaven's, if the Lord makes this singin' a lie! I'm thinkin' of David as I've thought of him these fifty years, years before ye were born, sir, an' if a lie will make him happy when he's dyin', then I'm willin' to lie, an' do it every minute of the day.

MORRIS

That means you are willing to sin?

ANNIE

Aye, sir, to sin. I'm a willin' sinner!

MORRIS (*more gently*)

You are overwrought, Annie.

ANNIE (*wearily*)

Ye're all against me, sir.

MORRIS

Nay, nay, but wouldn't it be better if I were to tell David about the cuckoo?

ANNIE (*sobbing*)

Oh, no, no, no, sir! Not that!

MORRIS (*stretching out his hand to comfort her*)

Annie, there, there, you mustn't cry so.

ANNIE

'Tis all the happiness he's got, an' he's goin'. Oh, my lad, my lad!

MORRIS

There, there, Annie!

ANNIE

We've been married fifty years this spring, an' every spring we've listened for the cuckoo an' not one missed. An' now he's a-dyin' an' a-wantin' to hear it so, an' 'twas over-early, an' then I thought of bein' the cuckoo myself. Oh, Davy, Davy darlin'!

MORRIS (*altogether forgetting his pastoral severity*)

There, Annie, there, dear, tell me about it! We'll see, Annie.

ANNIE

There's no more. Only he kept askin' about the spring, the violets an' marsh marigolds, an' I knew all the time he was thinkin' of the cuckoo an' not askin' because he was goin' an' mightn't hear it. An' then he did. An' I said I thought he'd hear one this

evenin', that everythin' was over-early whatever. After that he seemed happier than I'd seen him, an' I closed his windows an' went off into the garden to practise it. I worked at it till I could do it fair. Oh, Davy, Davy lad!

MORRIS

Now, Annie dear, don't cry, just tell me more.

ANNIE

Then, sir, I sang the song here by this tree, an' when he called me to him, there was such a look of joy on his face as has not been there this long time. 'Tis the last happiness I can give him, sir.

DAVID (*calling*)

Annie, Annie!

ANNIE

He's callin'. Aye, lad dear, I'm comin'.

[*She goes into cottage and, after opening all the windows, stands by the foot of David's bed.*]

DAVID

Have ye heard the cuckoo singing'?

ANNIE

No, not yet. It must be singin' again soon.

DAVID (*anxiously*)

Ye're sure 'tis goin' to sing?

ANNIE (*gathering him up and turning his pillow*)

Indeed, yiss, an' with the windows all open, ye'll be hearin' it fine an' clear, ye will. I'll go back up into the garden to see is the cuckoo there.

DAVID

Will it be singin' over an' over again, the way it did that first time?

ANNIE

Aye, I'm thinkin' so, lad darlin'. Ye must listen quietly.

DAVID

'Twas so beautiful singin'. I'd like hearin' it with ye here beside me.

ANNIE (*kissing him*)

I'll come back, lad.

DAVID.

Aye, I'll be waitin' for ye.

[*Annie goes out of the cottage door and back into garden where Pastor Morris is standing, his hat off, while Annie and David are talking together. He can see them both, but David cannot see him. Annie and Morris converse in whispers. The cuckoo song begins to be played softly.*]

MORRIS

Is he worse?

ANNIE (*looking at Morris beseechingly*)

I cannot tell, sir, but he's longin' to hear the cuckoo sing again.

MORRIS

I see and you are wishing to do it again?

ANNIE

Yiss, an' with the lad dyin', can ye tell me not to do what Davy is askin' for? Each time might be his last, sir.

MORRIS (*after a moment's hesitation*)

Nay, go sing for him. I will stand guard for you, and no one shall disturb you.

ANNIE (*a deep sigh of relief*)

Oh, sir, thank you! 'Tis sure to be a comfort. But ye're harmin' your conscience for me, sir, areye?

MORRIS (*humbly*)

I'm not saying, Annie; I'm over-young to have a conscience in some things.

ANNIE (*taking his hand to kiss it*)

May God bless ye, sir, for bein' kind to an old woman! [*The sun has set behind the Chapel, and it is rapidly growing dark as the music grows louder. Morris steps back to the garden gate to keep watch. Annie stands by the tree and, dropping her hands by her side, lifting her head, and swaying her old body to and fro, sings the cuckoo song over and over again three times. David has risen in bed, an expression of rapturous delight upon his face as he leans against the casement listening. The lights are being lighted in the chapel, and the chapel bell begins to ring.*]

DAVID (*calling faintly*)

Annie, Annie darlin', come quickly, the cuckoo's singin'!

ANNIE (*hastening towards him*)

Yiss, lad, I'm comin'.

DAVID (*stretching out his hands towards her*)

Annie, sweetheart, did ye hear the cuckoo singin'?

ANNIE

Yiss, dearie, loud and clear.

DAVID (*trying to imitate its song while his voice grows fainter*)

It sang over an' over like this —

ANNIE (*within the cottage and beside David*)

Yiss, dear, I see.

DAVID (*sinking back into her arms*)

An' — it — was — quiet — but — Annie —

ANNIE (*holding him to her and crying out*)

Lad, lad dear, Davy, can ye not speak to me?

[*The bell for chapel stops ringing. The organ playing "Jesus, Lover of my Soul" is heard. Morris is standing by the gate, facing towards the old people, his hat off, his head bowed.*]

CURTAIN

THE DEACON'S HAT

CHARACTERS

- * DEACON ROBERTS, a stout, oldish Welshman.
- ✓ HUGH WILLIAMS, an earnest visionary young man who owns Y Gegin.
- NELI WILLIAMS, his capable wife.
- ✓ MRS. JONES, THE WASH, a stout kindly woman who wishes to buy soap.
- ✓ MRS. JENKINS, THE MIDWIFE, after pins for her latest baby.
- ✓ TOM MORRIS, THE SHEEP, who comes to buy tobacco and remains to pray.

THE DEACON'S HAT

SCENE: *A little shop called Y Gegin (The Kitchen) in Bala, North Wales.*

TIME: *Monday morning at half-past eleven.*

To the right is the counter of Y Gegin, set out with a bountiful supply of groceries; behind the counter are grocery-stocked shelves. Upon the counter is a good-sized enamel-ware bowl filled with herring pickled in brine and leek, also a basket of fresh eggs, a jar of pickles, some packages of codfish, a half dozen loaves of bread, a big round cheese, several pounds of butter wrapped in print paper, etc., etc.

To the left are a cheerful glowing fire and ingle.

At the back center is a door; between the door and the fire stands a grandfather's clock with a shining brass face. Between the clock and the door, back center, is a small tridarn [Welsh dresser] and a chair. From the rafters hang flitches of bacon, hams, bunches of onions, herbs, etc. On either side of the fireplace are latticed windows, showing a glimpse of the street. Before the fire is a small, round three-legged table, beside it a tall straight-backed chair.

Between the table and left is a door which is the entrance to Y Gegin and from which, on a metal elbow, dangles a large bell.

At rise of curtain Hugh Williams enters at back center, absorbed in reading a volume of Welsh theological essays. He is dressed in a brightly striped vest, a short, heavy

cloth coat, cut away in front and with lapels trimmed with brass buttons, swallowtails behind, also trimmed with brass buttons, stock wound around his neck, and tight trousers down to his boot tops.

Neli Williams, his wife, a comely, capable young woman, busy with her knitting every instant she talks, is clad in her market costume, a scarlet cloak and a tall black Welsh beaver. Over her arm is an immense basket.

NELI (*commandingly*)

Hughie, put down that book!

HUGH (*still going on reading*)

Haven't I just said a man is his own master, whatever!

NELI

Hughie, ye're to mind the shop while I'm gone!

HUGH (*patiently*)

Yiss, yiss.

NELI

I don't think ye hear a word I am sayin' whatever.

HUGH

Yiss, I hear every word ye're sayin'.

NELI

What is it then?

HUGH (*weakly*)

'T is all about — about — the — the weather whatever!

NELI

Ye've not heard a word, an' ye're plannin' to read that book from cover to cover, I can see.

HUGH (*a little too quickly*)

Nay, I have no plans . . .

[*He tucks book away in back coat pocket over-hastily.*]

NELI

Hugh!

HUGH (*weakly*)

Nay, I *have* no plans whatever!

NELI (*reproachfully*)

Hugh—*ie*! 'T would be the end of sellin' anythin' to anybody if I leave ye with a book whatever! Give me that book!

HUGH (*obstinately*)

Nay, I'll no read the book.

NELI

Give me that book!

HUGH (*rising a little*)

Nay. I say a man is his own master whatever!

NELI (*finding the book hidden in his coat-tail pocket*)

Is he? Well, I'll no leave ye with any masterful temptations to be readin'.

HUGH

Ye've no cause to take this book away from me.

NELI (*opens book and starts with delight*)

'Tis Deacon Roberts's new book on "The Flamin' Wickedness of Babylon." Where did ye get it?

HUGH (*reassured by her interest*)

He lent it to me this morning.

NELI (*resolutely*)

Well, I will take it away from ye this noon till I am home again whatever!

HUGH (*sulkily*)

Sellin' groceries is not salvation. They sold groceries in Babylon; Deacon Roberts says so.

NELI (*looking at book with ill-disguised eagerness*)

I dunno as anybody ever found salvation by givin' away all he had for nothin'! 'Tis certain Deacon Roberts has not followed that way.

HUGH (*still sulkily*)

A man is his own master, I say.

NELI (*absent-mindedly, her nose in the book*)

Is he? Well, indeed!

HUGH (*crossly*)

Aye, he is. (*Pointedly*) An' I was not plannin' to give away the book whatever.

NELI (*closing volume with a little sigh as for stolen delights and speaking busily*)

An' I am not talkin' about acceptin' books but about butter an' eggs an' cheese an' all the other groceries!

HUGH

Aye, ye'll get no blessin' from such worldliness.

NELI (*absent-mindedly*)

Maybe not, but ye will get a dinner from that un-blessed worldliness an' find no fault, I'm thinkin'. (*Her hand lingering on the book which she opens*) But such wonderful theology! An' such eloquence! Such an understandin' of sin! Such glowin' pictures of Babylon!

HUGH

Aye, hot! I tell ye, Neli, there's no man in the parish has such a gift of eloquence as Deacon Roberts or such theology. In all Wales ye'll not find stronger theology than his.

NELI

Ye have no need to tell me that! (*Looking for a place in which to hide the book until she returns*) Have

I not a deep an' proper admiration for theology? Have I not had one minister an' five deacons an' a revivalist in my family, to say nothin' at all of one composer of hymns?

HUGH

Yiss, yiss. Aye, 't is a celebrated family. I am no sayin' anythin' against your family.

NELI

Then what?

HUGH (*pleadingly*)

Deacon Roberts has great fire with which to save souls. We're needin' that book on Babylon's wickedness. Give it back to me, Neli!

NELI

Oh, aye! (*Looks at husband*) I'm not sayin' but that ye are wicked, Hugh, an' needin' these essays, for ye have no ministers and deacons and hymn composers among your kin.

HUGH (*triumphantly*)

Aye, aye, that's it! That's it! An' the more need have I to read till my nostrils are full of the smoke of — of Babylon.

NELI (*absent-mindedly tucking book away on shelf as she talks*)

Aye, but there has been some smoke about Deacon Roberts's reputation which has come from some fire less far away than Babylon.

HUGH

What smoke?

NELI (*evasively*)

Well, I am thinkin' about my eggs which vanished one week ago to-day. There was no one in that

mornin' but Deacon Roberts. Mrs. Jones the Wash had come for her soap an' gone before I filled that basket with eggs.

HUGH (*watching her covertly, standing on tiptoe and craning his neck as she stows away book*)

Yiss, yiss!

NELI (*slyly*)

Ask Deacon Roberts if cats steal eggs whatever?

HUGH (*repeating*)

If cats steal eggs, if cats steal eggs.

NELI

Aye, not if eggs steal cats.

HUGH (*craning neck*)

Yiss, yiss, if eggs steal cats!

NELI

Hugh—ie! Now ye'll never get it correct again!

'T is if cats steal eggs.

HUGH (*sulkily*)

Well, I'm no carin' about cats with heaven starin' me in the face.

[*Neli turns about swiftly with the quick sudden motions characteristic of her, and Hugh shrinks into himself. She shakes her finger at him and goes over to kiss him.*]

NELI

Hughie lad, ye're not to touch the book while I am gone to market.

HUGH

Nay, nay, certainly not!

NELI

And ye're to be on the lookout for Mrs. Jones the Wash, for Mrs. Jenkins the Midwife — Jane Elin has a new baby, an' it'll be needin' somethin'. (*Point-*

ing to counter) Here is everythin' plainly marked. Ye're no to undersell or give away anythin'. D' ye hear?

HUGH

Aye, I hear!

NELI

An' remember where the tobacco is, for this is the day Tom Morris the Sheep comes in.

HUGH

Aye, in the glass jar.

NELI

Good-by. I will return soon.

HUGH (*indifferently*)

Good-by.

[*Neli leaves by door at back center. Immediately Hugh steals towards the shelves where she hid the book.*]

NELI (*thrusting head back in*)

Mind, Hughie lad, no readin' — nay, not even any theology!

HUGH (*stepping quickly away from shelves and repeating parrot-like*)

Nay, nay, no readin', no sermons, not even any theology!

NELI

An' no salvation till I come back!

[*She smiles, withdraws head, and is gone. Hugh starts forward, collides clumsily with the counter in his eagerness, knocks the basket of eggs with his elbow, upsetting it. Several eggs break. He shakes his head ruefully at the mess and as ruefully at the counter. He finds book and hugs it greedily to him.*]

HUGH (*mournfully*)

Look at this! What did I say but that there was no salvation sellin' groceries! If Neli could but see those eggs! (*He goes behind counter and gets out a box of eggs, from which he re-fills the basket. The broken eggs he leaves untouched upon the floor. He opens his volume of sermons and seats himself by a little three-legged table near the fire. He sighs in happy anticipation. Hearing a slight noise, he looks suspiciously at door, gets up, tiptoes across floor to street door, and locks it quietly. An expression of triumph overspreads his face*) Da, if customers come, they will think no one is at home whatever, an' I can read on! (*He seats himself at little three-legged table, opens volume, smooths over its pages lovingly, and begins to read slowly and halting over syllables*) The smoke of Ba-by-lon was hot — scorchin' hot. An' 'twas filled with Ba-ba-ba-baal stones, slimy an' scorchin' hot also — [*There is the sound of feet coming up the shop steps, followed by a hand trying the door knob. Hugh looks up from his sermons, an expression of innocent triumph on his face. The door knob is tried again, the door rattled.*

Then some one rings the shop doorbell.

MRS. JONES THE WASH (*calling*)

Mrs. Williams, mum, have ye any soap? (*No answer. Calling*) Mrs. Williams! Mrs. Williams!

[*Hugh nods approvingly and lifts his volume to read.*

MRS. JONES THE WASH

Where are they all whatever? I will just look in at the window. (*A large kindly face is anxiously flattened against the window. At that Hugh drops in con-*

sternation under the three-legged table) Uch, what's that shadow skippin' under the table? No doubt a rat after the groceries. Mrs. Williams, mum, Mrs. Williams! Well, indeed they're out.

[She pounds once more on the door with a heavy fist, rings, and then goes. Suddenly the door back center opens, and Neli Williams appears.]

NELI *(she does not see Hugh and peers around for him)*

What is all that bell-ringing about?

[Hugh crawls out from under table.]

HUGH

Hush, she' gone!

NELI *(amazed and whispering to herself)*

Under the table!

HUGH *(rising and putting up his hand as a sign for her to keep silent)*

Nay, 't was Mrs. Jones the Wash come to buy her soap whatever!

NELI

Aye, well, why didn't she come in whatever?

HUGH *(whispering)*

I locked the door, Neli, so I could finish readin' those essays whatever! An' then she looked in at the window, an' I had to get under the table.

NELI *(indignantly)*

Locked the door against a customer, an' after all I said! An' crawled under a table! Hugh Williams, your wits are goin' quite on the downfall!

HUGH *(in a whisper)*

Aye, but Neli, those essays — an' I thought ye had gone to market.

NELI

I had started, but I came back for my purse. Put down that book!

HUGH

Aye, but, Neli —

NELI (*angrily*)

Much less of heaven an' much more of earth is what I need in a husband! Ye have sent away a customer; very like Mrs. Jones the Wash after soap will go elsewhere.

HUGH

Aye, but, Neli . . .

[*Steps are heard approaching.*]

NELI

Get up! Some one is coming.

[*Hugh gets up very unwillingly.*]

HUGH (*whispering still*)

Aye, but, Neli . . .

NELI (*angrily*)

Put down that book, I say! (*She crunches over some eggshells*) Eggs? Broken?

HUGH (*putting down book*)

Aye, Neli, my elbow an' the eggs in Babylon . . .

NELI (*sarcastically*)

Aye, I see beasts in Babylon here together, — doleful creatures smearin' one an' sixpence worth of eggs all over the floor. An' a half dozen eggs gone last week. (*Wiping up eggs*) An' I'm to suppose Babylon had something to do with that half dozen eggs, too? They were put in the basket after Mrs. Jones the Wash had left whatever, an' before Deacon Roberts came.

HUGH

Neli, I did not say . . .

NELI (*still angrily*)

Well, indeed, unlock that door!

HUGH (*going to unlock door*)

But, Neli . . .

NELI (*disappearing through door back center*)

Not a word! Your mind has gone quite on the down-fall — lockin' doors against your own bread and butter an' soap.

HUGH (*unlocking door sullenly*)

But, Neli, salvation an' soap . . .

NELI (*snappily*)

Salvation an' soap are as thick as thieves.

HUGH

But, Neli, a man is his own master.

NELI

Yiss, I see he is!

[*Neli goes out, slamming door noisily.*]

HUGH

Dear anwyl, she seems angry!

[*Hugh opens street door left just as Neli goes out through kitchen, by door back center. Deacon Roberts enters the door Hugh has unlocked. He looks at Hugh, smiles, and goes over to counter in a businesslike way. He is a stout man, dressed in a black broadcloth cutaway coat, tight trousers, a drab vest, high collar and stock, woollen gloves, a muffler wound about his neck and face, and a tall Welsh beaver hat. Under his arm he carries a book.*]

DEACON ROBERTS (*speaking affectionately, pulling off his gloves, putting down book on counter, and beginning eagerly to touch the various groceries*)

Essays on Babylon to-day, Hughie lad?

HUGH (*looking about for Neli and speaking fretfully*)

Nay.

DEACON ROBERTS (*unwinding his muffler*)

Ye look as if ye had been in spiritual struggle.

HUGH (*drearily*)

I have.

DEACON ROBERTS

Well, indeed, Hughie, 't is neither the angel nor the archfiend here now, nor for me any struggle except the struggle to both live an' eat well — ho! ho! an' eat well, I say — in Bala. (*Laughs jovially*)
Ho! ho! not bad, Hughie lad, — live an' eat in Bala!

HUGH (*patiently*)

With that muffler around your head, Deacon, ye are enough to frighten the devil out of Babylon.

DEACON ROBERTS (*unwinding last lap of muffler*)

Yiss, yiss, Hughie lad. But I dunno but ye will understand better if I call myself, let us say the angel with the sickle — ho! ho! — not the angel of fire, Hughie, but the angel with the sharp sickle gatherin' the clusters of the vines of the earth.
(*Sudden change of subject*) Where is Neli?

HUGH (*vacantly*)

I dunno — yiss, yiss, at market.

DEACON ROBERTS (*chuckling*)

Dear, dear, at market — a fine day for marketing!
An' my essays on the Flamin' Wickedness of Baby-

lon, Hughie lad, how are they? Have ye finished them?

HUGH

Nay, not yet.

DEACON ROBERTS (*looking over counter, touching one article after another as he mentions it*) Pickled herrin' — grand but wet! Pickles — dear me, yiss, Neli's — an' good! Butter from Hafod-y-Porth — sweet as honey! (*He picks up a pat of butter and sniffs it, drawing in his breath loudly. He smiles with delight and lays down the butter. He takes off his hat and dusts it out inside. He puts his hat back on his head, smiles, chuckles, picks up butter, taps it thoughtfully with two fingers, smells it and puts down the pat lingeringly. He lifts up a loaf of Neli Williams's bread, glancing from it to the butter*) Bread! Dear me! (*His eyes glance on to codfish*) American codfish, (*picks up package and smacks his lips loudly*) dear anwyl, with potatoes — (*reads*) "Gloucester." (*Reaches out and touches eggs affectionately*) Eggs — are they fresh, Hugh?

HUGH (*dreamily*)

I dunno. But I broke some of them. They might be!
[*Looks at floor.*]

DEACON ROBERTS

Were they fresh?

HUGH

I dunno.

DEACON ROBERTS (*sharply*)

Dunno? About eggs?

[*Picks up egg.*]

HUGH (*troubled*)

Neli's hens laid them.

DEACON ROBERTS

I see, Neli's hens laid 'em, an' you broke 'em! Admirable arrangement! (*Putting down the egg and turning towards the cheese, speaks on impatiently*)

Well, indeed then, were the hens fresh?

HUGH (*more cheerful*)

Yiss, I think. Last week the basket was grand an' full of fresh eggs, but they disappeared, aye, they did indeed.

DEACON ROBERTS (*starts*)

Where did they go to?

HUGH (*injured*)

How can I say? I was here, an' I would have told her if I had seen, but I did not whatever. Neli reproves me for too great attention to visions an' too little to the groceries.

DEACON ROBERTS (*chuckling*)

Aye, Hughie lad, such is married life! Let a man marry his thoughts or a wife, for he cannot have both. I have chosen my thoughts.

HUGH

But the cat —

DEACON ROBERTS (*briskly*)

Aye, a man can keep a cat without risk.

HUGH

Nay, nay, I mean the cat took 'em. I dunno. That's it — (*Hugh clutches his head, trying to recall something*) Uch, that's it! Neli told me to remember to ask ye if ye thought eggs could steal a cat whatever.

DEACON ROBERTS (*puzzled*)

Eggs steal a cat?

HUGH (*troubled*)

Nay, nay, cats steal an egg?

DEACON ROBERTS (*startled and looking suspiciously at Hugh*)

Cats? What cats?

HUGH (*with solemnity*)

Aye, but I told Neli I'm no carin' about cats with heaven starin' me in the face. Deacon Roberts, those essays are grand an' wonderful.

DEACON ROBERTS (*relieved*)

Yiss, yiss! Hughie lad, theology is a means to salvation an' sometimes to other ends, too. But there's no money in theology. (*Sighs*) And a man must live! (*Points to corroded dish of pickled herring, sniffing greedily*) Dear people, what beautiful herrin'! (*Wipes moisture away from corners of his mouth and picks up a fish from dish, holding it, dripping, by tail*) Pickled?

HUGH (*looking at corroded dish*)

Tuppence.

DEACON ROBERTS (*shortly*)

Dear to-day.

HUGH (*eyeing dish dreamily*)

I dunno. Neli —

DEACON ROBERTS (*eyes glittering, cutting straight through sentence and pointing to cheese*)

Cheese?

HUGH

A shillin', I'm thinkin'.

DEACON ROBERTS

A shillin', Hugh? (*Deacon Roberts lifts knife and drops it lightly on edge of cheese. The leaf it pares off he picks up and thrusts into his mouth, greedily pushing in the crumbs. Then he pauses and looks slyly at Hugh*) Was it sixpence ye said, Hugh?

HUGH (*gazing towards the fire and the volume of essays*)
Yiss, sixpence, I think.

DEACON ROBERTS (*sarcastically*)

Still too dear, Hugh!

HUGH (*sighing*)

I dunno, it might be dear. (*With more animation*)

Deacon, when Babylon fell —

DEACON ROBERTS (*wipes his mouth and, interrupting Hugh, speaks decisively*)

No cheese. (*He removes his tall Welsh beaver hat, mops off his bald white head, and, pointing up to the shelves, begins to dust out inside of hatband again but with a deliberate air of preparation*) What is that up there, Hughie lad?

HUGH (*trying to follow the direction of the big red wavering forefinger*)

Ye mean that? A B C In-fants' Food, I think.

DEACON ROBERTS (*giving his hat a final wipe*)

Nay, nay, not for me, Hughie lad! Come, come, brush the smoke of burnin' Babylon from your eyes! In a minute I must be goin' back to my study, whatever. An' I have need of food!

[*Hugh takes a chair and mounts it. The Deacon looks at Hugh's back, puts his hand down on the counter, and picks up an egg from the basket. He holds it to the light and squints through it to see whether it is fresh.*]

Then he turns it lovingly over in his fat palm, makes a dexterous backward motion and slides it into his coat-tail pocket. This he follows with two more eggs for same coat tail and three for other — in all half a dozen.

HUGH (*dreamily pointing to tin*)

Is it Yankee corn?

DEACON ROBERTS (*to Hugh's back and slipping in second egg*)

Nay, nay, not that, Hughie lad, that tin above!

HUGH (*absent-mindedly touching tin*)

Is it ox tongue?

DEACON ROBERTS (*slipping in third egg and not even looking up*)

Ox tongue, lad? Nay, nothin' so large as that.

HUGH (*dreamingly reaching up higher*)

American condensed m-m-milk? Yiss, that's what it is.

DEACON ROBERTS (*slipping in fourth egg*)

Condensed milk, Hughie? Back to infants' food again.

HUGH (*stretching up almost to his full length and holding down tin with tips of long white finger*)

Kippert herrin'? Is it that?

DEACON ROBERTS (*slipping in fifth egg*)

Nay, nay, a little further up, if you please.

HUGH (*gasping, but still reaching up and reading*)

Uto — Uto — U-to-pi-an Tinned Sausage. Is it that?

DEACON ROBERTS (*slipping in sixth egg with an air of finality and triumph, and lifting his hat from the counter*)

Nay, nay, not that, Hughie lad. Why do ye not

begin by askin' me what I want? Ye've no gift for sellin' groceries whatever.

HUGH (*surprised*)

Did I not ask ye?

DEACON ROBERTS

Nay.

HUGH

What would Neli say whatever? She would never forgive me.

DEACON ROBERTS (*amiably*)

Well, I forgive ye, Hughie lad. 'Tis a relish, I'm needin'!

HUGH (*relieved*)

Well, indeed, a relish! We have relishes on that shelf above, I think. (*Reaches up but pauses helplessly*) I must tell Neli that these shelves are not straight. [*Dizzy and clinging to the shelves, his back to the Deacon.*]

DEACON ROBERTS (*picking up a pound of butter wrapped in print paper*)

Is it up there?

HUGH

No, I think, an' the shelves are not fast whatever. I must tell Neli. They go up like wings. (*Trying to reach to a bottle just above him*) Was it English or American?

DEACON ROBERTS (*putting the pound of butter in his hat and his hat on his head*)

American, Hughie lad.

[*At that instant there is a noise from the inner kitchen, and Neli Williams opens the door. The Deacon turns,*

and their glances meet and cross. Each understands perfectly what the other has seen. Neli Williams has thrown off her red cloak and taken off her Welsh beaver hat. She is dressed in a short full skirt, white stockings, clogs on her feet, a striped apron, tight bodice, fichu, short sleeves, and white cap on dark hair.

NELI (*slowly*)

Uch! The Deacon has what he came for whatever!

HUGH (*turning to contradict his wife*)

Nay, Neli, — (*Losing his balance on chair, tumbles off, and, with arm flung out to save himself, strikes dish of pickled herring. The herring and brine fly in every direction, spraying the Deacon and Hughie; the bowl spins madly, dipping and revolving on the floor. For a few seconds nothing is audible except the bowl revolving on the flagstones and Hugh picking himself up and sneezing behind the counter*)

Achoo! Achoo! Dear me, Neli — Achoo!

NELI (*going quickly to husband and beginning to wipe brine from husband's forehead and cheeks; at the same time has her back to the Deacon and forming soundless letters with her lip, she jerks her head towards the Deacon*)

B-U-T-T-E-R!

HUGH (*drearily*)

Better? Aye, I'm better. It did not hurt me whatever.

NELI (*jerking head backwards towards Deacon Roberts and again forming letters with lips*)

B-U-T-T-E-R!

HUGH

What, water? Nay, I don't want any water.

DEACON ROBERTS (*coughing, ill at ease and glancing suspiciously at bowl that has come to rest near his leg*)
Ahem! 'T is cold here, Mrs. Williams, mum, an' I must be movin' on.

NELI (*savagely to Deacon*)

Stay where ye are whatever!

DEACON ROBERTS (*unaccustomed to being spoken to this way by a woman*)

Well, indeed, mum, I could stay, but I'm thinkin' 't is cold an' — I'd better go.

X NELI (*again savagely*)

Nay, stay! Stay for — for what ye came for whatever!
[Neli looks challengingly at the Deacon. Then she goes on wiping brine carefully from husband's hair and from behind his ears. The Deacon coughs and pushes bowl away with the toe of his boot.]

DEACON ROBERTS (*smiling*)

'T is unnecessary to remain then, mum.

NELI (*to Hugh*)

What did he get?

HUGH (*sneezing*)

N — n — Achoo! — nothin'!

DEACON ROBERTS (*with sudden interest looking at the floor*)

Well, indeed!

NELI (*suspiciously*)

What is it?

[He reaches down with difficulty to a small thick puddle on the floor just beneath his left coat tail. He aims a red forefinger at it, lifts himself, and sucks fingertip]

DEACON ROBERTS (*smiling*)

Ahem, Mrs. Williams, mum, 't is excellent herrin'

brine! (*From the basket on the counter he picks up an egg which he tosses lightly and replaces in basket*)
A beautiful fresh egg, Mrs. Williams, mum. I must be steppin' homewards.

X HUGH (*struggling to speak just as Neli reaches his nose, wringing it vigorously as she wipes it*)

Aye, but, Neli, I was just tellin' ye when I fell that I could not find the Deacon's relish — uch, achoo! achoo!

DEACON ROBERTS (*with finality, tossing the egg in air, catching it and putting it back in basket*)

Well, indeed, mum, I must be steppin' homewards now.

[*Neli's glance rests on fire burning on other side of room. She puts down wet cloth. She turns squarely on the Deacon.*]

NELI

What is your haste, Mr. Roberts? Please to go to the fire an' wait! I can find the relish.

DEACON ROBERTS (*hastily*)

Nay, nay, mum. I have no need any more — (*Coughs*) Excellent herrin' brine.

[*Goes towards door.*]

NELI (*to Hugh*)

Take him to the fire, Hugh. 'T is a cold day whatever! (*Insinuatingly to Deacon*) Have ye a reason for wantin' to go, Mr. Roberts?

DEACON ROBERTS (*going*)

Nay, nay, mum, none at all! But, I must not trouble ye. 'T is too much to ask, an' I have no time to spare an' —

NELI (*interrupting and not without acerbity*)

Indeed, Mr. Roberts, sellin' what we *can* is our profit. (*To Hugh, who obediently takes Deacon by arm and pulls him towards fire*) Take him to the fire, lad. (*To Deacon*) What kind of a relish was it, did ye say, Mr. Roberts?

DEACON ROBERTS (*having a tug of war with Hugh*)

'T is an Indian relish, mum, but I cannot wait.

HUGH (*pulling harder*)

American, ye said.

DEACON ROBERTS (*hastily*)

Yiss, yiss, American Indian relish, that is.

NELI

Tut, 't is our specialty, these American Indian relishes! We have several. Sit down by the fire while I look them up. (*Wickedly*) As ye said, Mr. Roberts, 't is cold here this morning.

DEACON ROBERTS

There, Hughie lad, I must not trouble ye. (*Looks at clock*) 'T is ten minutes before twelve, an' my dinner will be ready at twelve.

[*Pulls harder.*]

NELI (*to Hugh*)

Keep him by the fire, lad.

DEACON ROBERTS

There, Hughie lad, let me go!

[*But Hugh holds on, and the Deacon's coat begins to come off.*]

NELI (*sarcastically*)

The relish — American Indian, ye said, I think, — will make your dinner taste fine and grand!

DEACON ROBERTS (*finding that without leaving his coat behind he is unable to go, he glowers at Hugh and speaks sweetly to Neli*)

'T is a beautiful clock, Mrs. Williams, mum. But I have n't five minutes to spare.

NELI (*keeping a sharp lookout on the rim of the Deacon's hat*)

Well, indeed, I can find the relish in just one minute. An' ye'll have abundance of time left.

DEACON ROBERTS (*trapped and gazing at clock with fine air of indifference*)

'T is a clever, shinin' lookin' clock whatever, Mrs. Williams, mum.

NELI

Have ye any recollection of the name of the maker of the relish, Mr. Roberts?

X DEACON ROBERTS (*putting his hands behind him anxiously and parting his freighted coat tails with care; then, revolving, presenting his back and one large well-set bright-colored patch to the fire*)

Nay, I have forgotten it, Mrs. Williams, mum.

NELI

Too bad, but I'm sure to find it. (*She mounts upon chair. At this moment the shop doorbell rings violently, and there enters Mrs. Jones the Wash, very fat and very jolly. She is dressed in short skirt very full, clogs on her feet, a bodice made of striped Welsh flannel, a shabby kerchief, a cap on her head, and over this a shawl. Neli turns her head a little*)

Aye, Mrs. Jones the Wash, in a minute, if you please. Sit down until I find Deacon Roberts's relish whatever.

MRS. JONES THE WASH (*sits down on chair by door back center and folds her hands over her stomach*)

Yiss, yiss, mum, thank you. I've come for soap. I came once before, but no one was in.

NELI

Too bad!

MRS. JONES THE WASH

An' I looked in at the window an' saw nothin' but a skippin' shadow looked like a rat. Have ye any rats, Mrs. Williams, mum, do ye think?

NELI

Have I any rats? Well, indeed, 't is that I'm wantin' to know, Mrs. Jones the Wash!

MRS. JONES THE WASH

Well, I came back, for the water is eatin' the soap to-day as if 'twere sweets — aye, 't is a very meltin' day for soap!

[*Laughs.*]

DEACON ROBERTS

'T is sweet to be clean, Mrs. Jones the Wash.

MRS. JONES THE WASH (*laughing*)

Yiss, yiss, Deacon Roberts, there has many a chapel been built out of a washtub, an' many a prayer risen up from the suds!

DEACON ROBERTS (*solemnly*)

Aye, Mrs. Jones the Wash, 't is holy work, washin' is very holy work.

MRS. JONES THE WASH (*touched*)

Yiss, yiss, I thank ye, Deacon Roberts.

DEACON ROBERTS

Well, I must be steppin' homeward now.

NELI (*firmly*)

Nay, Mr. Roberts, I am searchin' on the shelf where I think that American Indian relish is. Ye act as if ye had some cause to hurry, Mr. Roberts. Wait a moment, if you please.

DEACON ROBERTS

Well, indeed, but I am keepin' Mrs. Jones the Wash waitin'!

NELI (*to Mrs. Jones*)

Ye are in no haste?

MRS. JONES THE WASH (*thoroughly comfortable and happy*)

Nay, mum, no haste at all. I am havin' a rest, an' 't is grand an' warm here whatever.

NELI (*maliciously to Deacon*)

Does it feel hot by the fire?

DEACON ROBERTS (*experiencing novel sensations on the crown of his bald head*)

Mrs. Williams, mum, 't is hot in Y Gegin, but as with Llanycil Churchyard, Y Gegin is only the portal to a hotter an' a bigger place where scorchin' flames burn forever an' forever. Proverbs saith, 'Hell an' destruction are never full.' What, then, shall be the fate of women who have no wisdom, Mrs. Williams, mum?

NELI (*searching for relish*)

Aye, what? Well, indeed, the men must know.

MRS. JONES THE WASH (*nodding her head appreciatively at Hugh*)

Such eloquence, Mr. Williams! Aye, who in chapel has such grand theology as Deacon Roberts!

[*She sighs. The bell rings violently again, and Tom*

Morris the Sheep enters. He is dressed in gaiters, a shepherd's cloak, etc., etc. He carries a crook in his hand. He is a grizzle-haired, rosy-faced old man, raw-boned, strong and awkward, with a half-earnest, half-foolish look.

NELI (*looking around*)

Aye, Tom Morris the Sheep, come in an' sit down. I am lookin' out an American Indian relish for the Deacon.

TOM MORRIS THE SHEEP

Yiss, mum. I am wantin' to buy a little tobacco, mum. 'T is lonely upon the hillsides with the sheep, whatever.

DEACON ROBERTS (*hastily*)

I must go now, Mrs. Williams, mum, an' ye can wait on Tom Morris.

TOM MORRIS THE SHEEP

Nay, nay, Mr. Roberts, sir, there is no haste.

NELI (*to Tom Morris*)

Sit down there by the door, if you please.

[*Tom Morris seats himself on other side of door by back center.*]

TOM MORRIS THE SHEEP

Yiss, mum. (*Touches his forelock to Mrs. Jones the Wash*) A grand day for the clothes, Mrs. Jones, mum.

MRS. JONES THE WASH

Yiss, yiss, an' as I was just sayin' 't is a meltin' day for the soap!

NELI (*significantly*)

An' perhaps 't is a meltin' day for somethin' besides soap!

[*She looks at Deacon.*]

HUGH (*earnestly*)

Yiss, yiss, for souls, meltin' for souls, I am hopin'.
(*Picking up the book from the little three-legged table, and speaking to the Deacon*) They are enlargin' the burial ground in Llanycil Churchyard — achoo! achoo!

DEACON ROBERTS (*slyly moving a step away from fire*)

They're only enlargin' hell, Hughie lad, an' in that place they always make room for all.

[*He casts a stabbing look at Neli.*]

MRS. JONES THE WASH (*nodding head*)

True, true, room for all! (*Chuckling*) But 't would be a grand place to dry the clothes in!

DEACON ROBERTS (*severely*)

Mrs. Jones, mum, hell is paved with words of lightness.

HUGH (*looking up from book, his face expressing delight*)

Deacon Roberts, I have searched for the place of hell, but one book sayeth one thing, an' another another. Where is hell?

TOM MORRIS THE SHEEP

Aye, where is hell?

[*The bell rings violently. All start except Neli. Mrs. Jenkins the Midwife enters. She is an old woman, white-haired and with a commanding, somewhat disagreeable expression on her face. She wears a cloak and black Welsh beaver and walks with a stick.*]

NELI

Yiss, yiss, Mrs. Jenkins the Midwife, I am just lookin' out a relish for the Deacon. Sit down by the fire, please.

MRS. JENKINS THE MIDWIFE (*seating herself on other side of fire*)

Aye, mum, I've come for pins; I'm in no haste, mum.

NELI

Is it Jane Elin's baby?

MRS. JENKINS THE MIDWIFE

Aye, Jane Elin's, an' 't is my sixth hundredth birth.

HUGH

We're discussing the place of hell, Mrs. Jenkins, mum.

MRS. JENKINS THE MIDWIFE

Well, indeed, I have seen the place of hell six hundred times then. (*Coughs and nods her head up and down over stick*) Heaven an' hell I'm thinkin' we have with us here.

HUGH

Nay, nay, how could that be? Tell us where is the place of hell, Deacon Roberts.

[*All listen with the most intense interest.*]

DEACON ROBERTS (*nodding*)

Aye, the place of hell — (*stopping suddenly, a terrified look on his face, as the butter slides against the forward rim of his hat, almost knocking it off, then going on with neck rigid and head straight up*) to me is known where is that place — their way is dark an' slippery; they go down into the depths, an' their soul is melted because of trouble.

NELI (*pausing sceptically*)

Aye, 't is my idea of hell whatever with souls meltin', Mr. Roberts!

HUGH (*tense with expectation*)

Tell us where is that place!

DEACON ROBERTS (*neck rigid, head unmoved and voice querulous*)

Yiss, yiss. (*Putting his hand up and letting it down quickly*) Ahem! Ye believe that it rains in Bala?

HUGH (*eyes on Deacon in childlike faith*)

I do.

MRS. JENKINS THE MIDWIFE

Yiss, yiss, before an' after every birth whatever!

MRS. JONES THE WASH

Yiss, yiss, who would know better than I that it rains in Bala?

TOM MORRIS THE SHEEP

Aye, amen, it rains in Bala upon the hills an' in the valleys.

DEACON ROBERTS

Ye believe that it can rain in Bala both when the moon is full an' when 't is new?

HUGH (*earnestly*)

I do.

MRS. JONES THE WASH (*wearily*)

Yiss, any time.

TOM MORRIS THE SHEEP

Aye, all the time.

MRS. JENKINS THE MIDWIFE

Yiss, yiss, it rains ever an' forever!

NELI (*forgetting the relish search*)

Well, indeed, 't is true it *can* rain in Bala at any time an' at all times.

DEACON ROBERTS (*paying no attention to Neli*)

Ye believe that Tomen-y-Bala is Ararat?

HUGH (*clutching his book more tightly and speaking in a whisper*)

Yiss.

MRS. JONES THE WASH

Aye, 't is true.

MRS. JENKINS THE MIDWIFE

Yiss, the Hill of Bala is Ararat.

TOM MORRIS THE SHEEP

Yiss, I have driven the sheep over it whatever more than a hundred times.

NELI (*both hands on counter, leaning forward, listening to Deacon's words*)

Aye, Charles-y-Bala said so.

DEACON ROBERTS (*still ignoring Neli and lowering his coat tails carefully*)

Ye believe, good people, that the Druids called Noah "Tegid," an' that those who were saved were cast up on Tomen-y-Bala?

HUGH

Amen, I do!

MRS. JENKINS THE MIDWIFE (*nodding her old head*)

Aye, 't is true.

MRS. JONES THE WASH

Yiss, yiss.

TOM MORRIS THE SHEEP

Amen, 't is so.

DEACON ROBERTS (*moving a few steps away from the fire, standing sidewise, and lifting hand to head, checking it in midair*)

An' ye know that Bala has been a lake, an' Bala will become a lake?

HUGH

Amen, I do!

NELI (*assenting for the first time*)

Yiss, 't is true — that is.

MRS. JONES THE WASH

Dear *anwyl*, yiss!

DEACON ROBERTS (*with warning gesture towards window*)

Hell is out there — movin' beneath Bala Lake to meet all at their comin'. (*Raises his voice suddenly*)

Red-hot Baal stones will fall upon your heads —

Baal stones. Howl ye! (*Shouting loudly*) Meltin'

stones smellin' of the bullocks. Howl, ye sinners!

(*Clasping his hands together desperately*) Scorchin'

hot — Oo — o — o — Howl ye! — howl ye!

(*The Deacon's hat sways, and he jams it down more tightly on his head. Unclasping his hands and as if*

stirring up the contents of a pudding dish) 'Round

an' round like this! Howl, ye sinners, howl!

[*All moan and sway to and fro except Neli.*]

NELI (*sceptically*)

What is there to fear?

MRS. JENKINS THE MIDWIFE (*groaning*)

Nay, but what is there not to fear?

MRS. JONES THE WASH

Aye, outermost darkness. Och! Och!

TOM MORRIS THE SHEEP

Have mercy!

DEACON ROBERTS (*shouting again*)

Get ready! Lift up your eyes! (*Welsh beaver almost falls off and is set straight in a twinkling*) Beg for

mercy before the stones of darkness burn thee, an' there is no water to cool thy tongue, an' a great gulf is fixed between thee an' those who might help thee!

NELI (*spellbound by the Deacon's eloquence and now oblivious to hat, etc.*)

Yiss, yiss, 't is true, 't is very true!

[*She steps down from chair and places hands on counter.*]

DEACON ROBERTS (*his face convulsed, shouting directly at her*)

Sister, hast thou two eyes to be cast into hell fire?

NELI (*terrified and swept along by his eloquence*)

Two eyes to be burned?

[*All lower their heads, groaning and rocking to and fro.*]

DEACON ROBERTS (*the butter trickling down his face, yelling with sudden violence*)

Hell is here an' now. Here in Bala, here in Y Gegin, here with us! Howl ye! Howl, ye sinners!

[*All moan together.*]

HUGH (*whispering*)

Uch, here!

MRS. JENKINS THE MIDWIFE

Yiss, here!

MRS. JONES THE WASH

Yiss.

TOM MORRIS THE SHEEP (*terrified*)

Aye. Amen! Yiss!

NELI (*whispering*)

Here in Y Gegin!

DEACON ROBERTS (*clapping his hands to his face*)

Stones of Baal, stones of darkness, slimy with ooze, red-hot ooze, thick vapors! Howl ye, howl, ye sinners!

(*All moan and groan. Takes a glance at clock, passes hand over face and runs on madly, neck rigid, eyes staring, fat red cheeks turning to purple*)

Midday, not midnight, is the hour of hell; its sun never sets! But who knows when comes that hour of Hell?

NELI (*taking hands from counter and crossing them as she whispers*)

Who knows?

ALL (*groaning*)

Who knows?

HUGH (*voice quavering and lifting his Welsh essays*)

Who knows?

DEACON ROBERTS (*big yellow drops pouring down his face, his voice full of anguish*)

I will tell ye when is the hour of Hell. (*He points to the clock*) Is one the hour of Hell? Nay. Two? Nay. Three? No, not three. Four? Four might be the hour of Hell, but 't is not. Five? Nor five, indeed. Six? Nay. Seven? Is seven the hour, the awful hour? Nay, not yet. Eight? Is eight the hour — an hour bright as this bright hour? Nay, eight is not. (*The Deacon shouts in a mighty voice and points with a red finger at the clock*) 'T is comin'! 'T is comin', I say! Howl ye, howl! Only one min-

ute more! Sinners, sinners, lift up your eyes! Cry for mercy! (*All groan*) Cry for mercy! When the clock strikes twelve, 't will be the hour of Hell! Fix your eyes upon the clock! Watch! Count! Listen! 'T is strikin'. The stroke! The hour is here!

[*All dropped on their knees and turned towards the clock, their backs to the street door, are awaiting the awful stroke. The book has fallen from Hugh's hands. Neli's hands are clenched. Mrs. Jenkins the Midwife is nodding her old head. Mrs. Jones the Wash, on her knees, her face upturned to the clock, is rubbing up and down her thighs as if at the business of washing. Tom Morris the Sheep is prostrate and making a strange buzzing sound between his lips. The wheels of the clever old timepiece whir and turn. Then in the silent noonday the harsh striking begins: One, Two, Three, Four, Five, Six, Seven, Eight, Nine, Ten, Eleven, Twelve.*]

DEACON ROBERTS (*yelling suddenly in a loud and terrible voice*)

Hell let loose! Howl ye! Howl, ye sinners! (*All cover their eyes. All groan or moan. The clock ticks, the flame in the grate flutters, Neli's bosom rises and falls heavily*) Lest worse happen to ye, sin no more! [*The Deacon looks at them all quietly. Then he lifts his hands in sign of blessing, smiles and vanishes silently through street door. All remain stationary in their terror. Nothing happens. But at last Neli fearfully, still spellbound by the Deacon's eloquence, lifts her eyes to the clock. Then cautiously she turns a little towards the fire and the place of Deacon Roberts.*]

NELI

Uch! (*She stands on her feet and cries out*) The Deacon is gone!

HUGH (*raising his eyes*)

Uch, what is it? Babylon —

NELI

Babylon nothing!

[*She wrings her hands.*]

MRS. JENKINS THE MIDWIFE (*groaning*)

Is he dead? Is he dead?

NELI (*with sudden plunge towards the door*)

Uch, ye old hypocrite, ye villain! Uch, my butter an' my eggs, my butter an' my eggs!

[*Neli throws open the door and slams it to after her as she pursues the Deacon out into the bright midday sunshine.*]

MRS. JENKINS THE MIDWIFE

Well, indeed, what is it? Has she been taken?

MRS. JONES THE WASH (*getting up heavily*)

Such movin' eloquence! A saintly man is Deacon Roberts!

TOM MORRIS THE SHEEP

Aye, a saintly man is Deacon Roberts!

HUGH (*picking up his book and speaking slowly*)

Aye, eloquence that knoweth the place of Hell even better than it knoweth Bala whatever!

MRS. JENKINS THE MIDWIFE (*very businesslike*)

Aye, 't was a treat — a rare treat! But where's my pins now?

MRS. JONES THE WASH (*very businesslike*)

Yiss, yiss, 't was a grand an' fine treat. But I'm wantin' my soap now.

TOM MORRIS THE SHEEP

Have ye any tobacco, Hughie lad?

CURTAIN

WELSH HONEYMOON

CHARACTERS

VAVASOUR JONES

CATHERINE JONES, his wife

EILIR MORRIS, nephew of Vavasour Jones

MRS. MORGAN, the baker

HOWELL HOWELL, the milliner

WELSH HONEYMOON

PLACE: *Beddgelert, a little village in North Wales.*

A Welsh kitchen. At back, in center, a deep ingle, with two hobs and fire bars fixed between, on either side settles. On the left-hand side near the fire a church; on the right, in a pile, some peat ready for use. Above the fireplace is a mantel on which are set some brass candlesticks, a deep copper cheese bowl, and two pewter plates. Near the left settle is a three-legged table set with teapot, cups and saucers for two, a plate of bread and butter, a plate of jam, and a creamer. At the right and to the right of the door, is a tall, highly polished, oaken grandfather's clock, with a shining brass face; to the left of the door is a tridarn. The tridarn dresser is lined with bright blue paper and filled with luster china. The floor is of beaten clay, whitewashed around the edges; from the rafters of the peaked ceiling hang flitches of bacon, hams, and bunches of onions and herbs. On the hearth is a copper kettle singing gaily; and on either side of the fireplace are latticed windows opening into the kitchen. Through the door to the right, when open, may be seen the flagstones and cottages of a Welsh village street; through latticed windows the twinkling of many village lights.

It is about half after eleven on Allhallows Eve in the village of Beddgelert.

At rise of curtain, the windows of kitchen are closed; the fire is burning brightly, and two candles are lighted on the mantelpiece. Vavasour Jones, about thirty-five

years old, dressed in a striped vest, a short, heavy blue coat, cut away in front, and with swallowtails behind, and trimmed with brass buttons, and somewhat tight trousers down to his boot tops, is standing by the open door at the right, looking out anxiously onto the glittering, rain-wet flagstone street and calling after some one.

VAVASOUR¹ (*calling*)

Kats, Kats, mind ye come home soon from Pally Hughes's!

CATHERINE (*from a distance*)

Aye, I'm no wantin' to go, but I must. Good-by!

VAVASOUR

Good-by! Kats, ye mind about comin' home? (*There is no reply, and Vavasour looks still further into the rain-wet street. He calls loudly and desperately*) Kats, Kats darlin', I cannot let you go without tellin' ye that — Kats, do ye hear?

[*There is still no reply and after one more searching of the street, Vavasour closes the door and sits down on the end of the nearest settle.*]

VAVASOUR

Dear, dear, she's gone, an' I may never see her again, an' I'm to blame, an' she didn't know whatever that in the night — (*Loud knocking on the closed door; Vavasour jumps and stands irresolute*) The devil, it can't be comin' for her already?

[*The knocking grows louder.*]

VOICE (*calling*)

Catherine, Vavasour, are ye in?

¹ The a's are broad throughout, i. e. Kats is pronounced Kaats; Vavasour is Vavasoar: ou is oo.

VAVASOUR (*opening the door*)

Aye, come in, whoever ye are.

[*Mrs. Morgan the Baker, dressed in a scarlet whittle and freshly starched white cap beneath her tall Welsh beaver hat, enters, shaking the rain from her cloak.*]

MRS. MORGAN

Where's Catherine?

VAVASOUR

She's gone, Mrs. Morgan.

MRS. MORGAN

Gone? Are ye no goin'? Not goin' to Pally Hughes's on Allhallows' Eve?

VAVASOUR (*shaking his head and looking very white*)

Nay, I'm no feelin' well.

MRS. MORGAN

Aye, I see ye're ill?

VAVASOUR

Well, I'm not ill, but I'm not well. Not well at all, Mrs. Morgan.

MRS. MORGAN

We'll miss ye, but I must hurryin' on whatever; I'm late now. Good night!

VAVASOUR (*speaking drearily*) Good night! (*He closes the door and returns to the settle, where he sits down by the pile of peat and drops his head in his hand. Then he starts up nervously for no apparent cause and opens one of the lattice windows. With an exclamation of fear, he slams it to and throws his weight against the door. Calling and holding hard to the door*) Ye've no cause to come here! Ye old death's head, get away!

[*Outside there is loud pounding on the door and a voice*

shouting for admittance. Vavasour is obliged to fall back as the door is gradually forced open, and a head is thrust in, a white handkerchief tied over it.

HOWELL HOWELL (*seeing the terror-stricken face of Vavasour*)

Well, man, what ails ye; did ye think I was a ghost? (*Howell Howell the Milliner, in highlows and a plum-colored coat, a handkerchief on his hat, enters, stamping off the rain and closing the door. He carefully wipes off his plum-colored sleeves and speaks indignantly*) Well, man, are ye crazy, keepin' me out in the rain that way? Where's Catherine?

VAVASOUR (*stammering*)

She's at P-p-p-ally Hughes's.

HOWELL HOWELL

Are ye no goin'?

VAVASOUR

Nay, Howell Howell, I'm no goin'.

HOWELL HOWELL

An' dressed in your best? What's the matter? Have ye been drinkin' whatever?

VAVASOUR (*wrathfully*)

Drinkin'! I'd better be drinkin' when neighbors go walkin' round the village on Allhallow's Eve with their heads done up in white.

HOWELL HOWELL

Aye, well, I can't be spoilin' the new hat I have, that I cannot. A finer beaver there has never been in my shop.

[*He takes off the handkerchief, hangs it where the heat of the fire will dry it a bit, and then, removing the beaver, shows it to Vavasour, turning it this way and that.*]

VAVASOUR (*absent-mindedly*)

Aye, grand, grand, man!

HOWELL HOWELL

What are ye gazin' at the clock for?

VAVASOUR (*guiltily*)

I'm no lookin' at anything.

HOWELL HOWELL

Well, indeed, I must be goin', or I shall be late at Pally Hughes's. Good night.

VAVASOUR

Good night.

(He closes the door and stands before the clock, studying it. While he is studying its face the door opens slowly, and the tumbled, curly head of a lad about eighteen years of age peers in. The door continues slowly to open. Vavasour unconscious all the while)
'Tis ten now. Ten, eleven, twelve; that's three hours left, 'tis; nay, nay, 'tis only two hours left, after all, an' then —

EILIR MORRIS (*bounding in and shutting the door behind him with a bang*)

Boo! Whoo — o — o!

VAVASOUR (*his face blanched, dropping limply on to the settle*)

The devil!

EILIR MORRIS (*troubled*)

Uch, the pity, Uncle! I didn't think, an' ye're ill!

VAVASOUR

Tut, tut, 'tis no matter, an' I'm not ill — not ill at all, but Eilir, lad, ye're kin, an' — could ye promise never to tell?

EILIR MORRIS (*who thinks his uncle has been drinking, speaks to him as if he would humor his whim*)

Aye, Uncle, I'm kin, an' I promise. Tell on. What is it? Are ye sick?

VAVASOUR (*drearily*)

Uch, lad, I'm not sick!

EILIR MORRIS

Well, what ails ye?

VAVASOUR

'Tis Allhallow's Eve an' —

EILIR MORRIS

Aren't ye goin' to Pally Hughes's?

VAVASOUR (*moaning and rising*)

Ow, the devil, goin' to Pally Hughes's while 'tis drawin' nearer an' nearer an' — Ow! 'Tis the night when Catherine must go.

EILIR MORRIS

When Aunt Kats must go! What do you mean?

VAVASOUR

She'll be dead to-night at twelve.

EILIR MORRIS (*bewildered*)

Dead at twelve? But she's at Pally Hughes's. Does she know it?

VAVASOUR

No, but I do, an' to think I've been unkind to her! I've tried this year to make up for it, but 'tis no use, lad; one year'll never make up for ten of harsh words, whatever. Ow!

[*Groaning, Vavasour collapses on to the settle and rocks to and fro, moaning aloud.*]

EILIR MORRIS (*mystified*)

Well, ye've not been good to her, Uncle, that's certain; but ye've been different the past year.

VAVASOUR (*sobbing*)

Aye, but a year'll not do any good, an' she'll be dyin' at twelve to-night. Ow! I've turned to the scriptures to see what it says about a man an' his wife, but it'll no do, no do, no do!

EILIR MORRIS

Have ye been drinkin', Uncle?

VAVASOUR (*hotly*)

Drinkin'!

EILIR MORRIS

Well, indeed, no harm, but, Uncle, I cannot understand why Aunt Kats's goin' an' where.

VAVASOUR (*rising suddenly from the settle and seizing Eilir by the coat lapel*)

She's goin' to leave me, lad; 'tis Allhallow's Eve whatever! An' she'll be dyin' at twelve. Aye, a year ago things were so bad between us, on Allhallow's Eve I went down to the church porch shortly before midnight to see whether the spirit of your Aunt Kats would be called an' —

EILIR MORRIS

Uncle, 'twas fair killin' her!

VAVASOUR

I wanted to see whether she would live the twelve months out. An' as I was leanin' against the church wall, hopin', aye, lad, prayin' to see her spirit there, an' know she'd die, I saw somethin' comin' 'round the corner with white over its head.

EILIR MORRIS (*wailing*)

Ow—w!

VAVASOUR

It drew nearer an' nearer, an' when it came in full view of the church porch, it paused, it whirled around like that, an' sped away with the shroud flappin' about its feet, an' the rain beatin' down on its white hood.

EILIR MORRIS (*wailing again*)

Ow — w!

VAVASOUR

But there was time to see that it was the spirit of Catherine, an' I was glad because my wicked prayer had been answered, an' because with Catherine dyin' the next Allhallow's, we'd have to live together only the year out.

EILIR MORRIS (*raising his hand*)

Hush, what's that?

VARASOUR

'Tis voices whatever.

[*Both listen, Eilir goes to the window, Varasour to the door. The voices become louder.*]

EILIR MORRIS

They're singin' a song at Pally Hughes's.

(*Voices are audibly singing*)

Ni awn adre bawb dan ganu,

Ar hyd y nos;

Saif ein hiaith safo Cymru,

Ar hyd y nos;

Bydded undeb a brawdgarwch

Ini'n gwlwm diogelwch,

Felly canwn er hyfrydwch,
Ar hyd y nos.

Sweetly sang beside a fountain,
All through the night,
Mona's maiden on that mountain,
All through the night.
When wilt thou, from war returning,
In whose breast true love is burning,
Come and change to joy my mourning,
By day and night?

VAVASOUR

Aye, they're happy, an' Kats does not know. I went home that night, lad, thinkin' 'twas the last year we'd have to live together, an', considerin' as 'twas the last year, I might just as well try to be decent an' kind. An' when I reached home, Catherine was up waitin' for me an' spoke so pleasantly, an' we sat down an' had a long talk — just like the days when we were courtin'.

EILIR MORRIS

Did she know, Uncle?

VAVASOUR (*puzzled*)

Nay, how could she know. But she seems queer, — as if she felt the evil comin'. Well, indeed, each day was sweeter than the one before, an' we were man an' wife in love an' kindness at last, but all the while I was thinkin' of that figure by the churchyard. Lad, lad, ye'll be marryin' before long, — be good to her, lad, be good to her!

[*Vavasour lets go the lapels of Eilir's coat and sinks*

back on to the settle, half sobbing. Outside the roar of wind and rain growing louder can be heard.

VAVASOUR (*looking at the clock*)

An' here 'tis Allhallow's Eve again, an' the best year of my life is past, an' she must die in an hour an' a half. Ow, ow! It has all come from my own evil heart an' evil wish. Think, lad, prayin' for her callin'; aye, goin' there, hopin' ye'd see her spirit, an' countin' on her death!

EILIR MORRIS (*mournfully*)

Aye, Uncle, 'tis bad, an' I've no word to say to ye for comfort. I recollect well the story Granny used to tell about Christmas Pryce; 'twas somethin' the same whatever. An' there was Betty Williams was called a year ago, an' is dead now; an' there was Silvan Griffith, an' Geffery, his friend, an' Silvan had just time to dig Geffery's grave an' then his own, too, by its side, an' they was buried the same day an' hour.

VAVASOUR (*wailing*)

Ow — w — w!

[At that moment the door is blown violently open by the wind; both men jump and stare out into the dark where only the dimmed lights of the rain-swept street are to be seen, and the very bright windows of Pally Hughes's cottage.]

EILIR MORRIS

Uch, she'll be taken there!

VAVASOUR

Aye, an', Eilir, she was loath to go to Pally's, but I could not tell her the truth.

EILIR MORRIS

Are ye not goin', Uncle?

VAVASOUR

Nay, lad, I cannot go. I'm fair crazy. I'll just be stayin' home, waitin' for them to bring her back.
Ow — w — w!

EILIR MORRIS

Tut, tut, Uncle, I'm sorry. I'll just see for ye what they're doin'.

[Eilir steps out and is gone for an instant. He comes back excitedly.]

VAVASOUR (*shouting after him*)

Can ye see her, lad?

EILIR MORRIS (*returning*)

Dear, they've a grand display, raisins an' buns, an' spices an' biscuits —

VAVASOUR

But your Aunt Kats?

EILIR MORRIS

Aye, an' a grand fire, an' a tub with apples in it an' —

VAVASOUR

But Catherine?

EILIR MORRIS

Aye, she was there near the fire, an' just as I turned, they blew the lights out.

VAVASOUR

Blew the lights out! Uch, she'll be taken there whatever!

EILIR MORRIS

They're tellin' stories in the dark.

VAVASOUR

Go back again an' tell what ye can see of your Aunt Kats, lad.

EILIR MORRIS

Aye.

VAVASOUR (*shouting after him*)

Find where she's sittin', lad — make certain of that.

EILIR MORRIS (*running in breathless*)

They're throwin' nuts on the fire —

VAVASOUR

Is she there?

EILIR MORRIS

I'm thinkin' she is, but old Pally Hughes was just throwin' a nut on the fire an' —

VAVASOUR (*impatiently*)

'Tis no matter about Pally Hughes whatever, but your Aunt Kats, did —

EILIR MORRIS

There was only the light of the fire; I did not see her, but I'll go again.

VAVASOUR

Watch for her nut an' see does it burn brightly.

EILIR MORRIS (*going out*)

Aye.

VAVASOUR (*calling after*)

Mind, I'm wantin' to know what she's doin'.

[*He has scarcely spoken the last word when a great commotion is heard: a door across the street being slammed to violently, and the sound of running feet. Vavasour straightens up, his eyes in terror on the door, which Catherine Jones throws open and bursts through.*]

VAVASOUR (*holding out his arms*)

Catherine, is it really ye!

[*Catherine, after a searching glance at him, draws herself up. Vavasour draws himself up, too, and then stoops to pick up some peat which he puts on the fire, and crosses over to left and sits down on the settle near the chimney, without having embraced her. Catherine's face is flushed, her eyes wild under the pretty white cap she wears, a black Welsh beaver above it. She is dressed in a scarlet cloak, under this a tight bodice and short, full skirt, bright stockings, and clogs with brass tips. Her apron is of heavy linen, striped; over her breast a kerchief is crossed, and from the elbows down to the wrist are full white sleeves stiffly starched.*]

CATHERINE

Yiss, yiss, 'twas dull at Pally's — very dull. My nut didn't burn very brightly, an' — an' — well, indeed, my feet was wet, an' I feared takin' a cold.

VAVASOUR

Yiss, yiss, 'tis better for ye here, dearie.

[*Then there is silence between them. Catherine still breathes heavily from the running, and Vavasour shuffles his feet. While they are both sitting there, unable to say a word, the door opens without a sound, and Eilir's curly head is thrust in. A guttural exclamation from him makes them start and look towards the door, but he closes it before they can see him. Catherine then takes off her beaver and looks at Vavasour. Vavasour opens his mouth, shuts it, and opens it again.*]

VAVASOUR (*desperately*)

Did ye have a fine time at Pally's?

CATHERINE

Aye, 'twas gay an' fine an' — an' — yiss, yiss, so 'twas an' so 'twasn't.

VAVASOUR (*his eyes seeking the clock*)

A quarter past eleven, uch! Katy, do ye recall Pastor Evan's sermon, the one he preached last New Year?

CATHERINE (*also glancing at the clock*)

Sixteen minutes after eleven — yiss — yiss —

VAVASOUR (*catching Catherine's glance at the clock*)

Well, Catherine, do —

CATHERINE

Yiss, yiss, I said I did whatever. 'Twas about inheritin' the grace of life together.

VAVASOUR

Kats, dear, wasn't he sayin' that love is eternal, an' that — a man — an' — an' — his wife was lovin' for — for —

CATHERINE (*glancing at the clock and meeting Vavasour's eyes just glancing away from the clock*)

Aye, lad, for everlastin' life! Uch, what have I done?

VAVASOUR (*unheeding and doubling up as if from pain*)

Half after eleven! Yiss, yiss, dear, didn't he say that the Lord was mindful of us — of our difficulties, an' our temptations an' our mistakes?

CATHERINE (*tragically*)

Aye, an' our mistakes. Ow, ow, ow, but a half hour's left!

VAVASOUR

Do ye think, dearie, that if a man were to — to —

uch! — be unkind to his wife — an' was sorry an' his wife — his wife dies, that he'd be — be —

CATHERINE (*tenderly*)

Aye, I'm thinkin' so. An', lad dear, do ye think if anythin' was to happen to ye to-night, — yiss, *this* night, — that ye'd take any grudge against me away with ye?

VAVASOUR (*stiffening*)

Happen to *me*, Catherine?

[*Vavasour collapses, groaning. Catherine goes to his side on the settle.*]

CATHERINE (*in an agonized voice*)

Uch, dearie, what is it, what is it, what ails ye?

VAVASOUR (*slanting an eye at the clock*)

Nothin', nothin' at all. Ow, the devil, 'tis twenty minutes before twelve whatever!

CATHERINE

Lad, lad, what is it?

VAVASOUR

'Tis nothin', nothin' at all — 'tis — ow! — 'tis just a little pain across me.

CATHERINE (*her face whitening as she steals a look at the clock and puts her arm around Vavasour*)

Vavasour, lad dear, is that the wind in the chimney?

Put your arm about me an' hold fast.

VAVASOUR (*both hands across his stomach, his eyes on the clock*)

Ow — ten minutes!

CATHERINE (*shaking all over*)

Is that a step at the door?

VAVASOUR (*unheeding*)

'Tis goin' to strike now in a minute.

CATHERINE (*her eyes in horror on the clock*)

Five minutes before twelve!

VAVASOUR (*almost crying, his eyes fixed on the clock's face*)

Uch, the toad, the serpent!

CATHERINE (*her face in her hands*)

Dear God, he's goin' now!

VAVASOUR (*covering his eyes*)

Uch, the devil! Uch, the gates of hell!

[*Catherine cries out, Vavasour groans loudly. The clock is striking: One, Two, Three, Four, Five, Six, Seven, Eight, Nine, Ten, Eleven, Twelve! The last loud clang vibrates and subsides. Through a chink in her fingers Catherine is peering at Vavasour. Through a similar chink his agonized eyes are peering at her.*

CATHERINE (*gulping*)

Uch!

VAVASOUR

The devil!

CATHERINE (*putting out her hand to touch him*)

Lad, dear!

[*They embrace, they kiss, they dance madly about. Then they do it all over again. While they are doing this, Eilir opens the door again and thrusts in his head. He stares open-eyed, open-mouthed at them, and leans around the side of the door to see what time it is, saying audibly "five minutes past twelve," grunts his satisfaction, and closes the door.*

VAVASOUR (*mad with joy*)

Kats, are ye here, really here?

CATHERINE (*surprised*)

Am I here? Tut, lad, are ye here?

VAVASOUR (*shrewdly*)

Yiss, that is are we *both* here?

CATHERINE (*perplexed*)

Did ye think I wasn't goin' to be?

VAVASOUR (*suppressed intelligent joy in his eyes*)

No — o, not that, only I thought, I thought ye was goin' to — to — to faint, Kats. I thought ye looked like it, Kats.

CATHERINE (*the happiness on her face vanishing, sinks on to the nearest settle*)

Uch, I'm a bad, bad woman, aye, Vavasour Jones, a *bad* woman!

VAVASOUR (*puzzled, yet lightly*)

Nay, Kats, nay!

CATHERINE (*desperately and almost in tears*)

Ye cannot believe what I must tell ye. Lad, a year ago this night I went to the church porch, hopin', aye, prayin', ye'd be called, that I'd see your spirit walkin'.

VAVASOUR (*starting and recovering himself*)

Catherine, ye did that!

CATHERINE (*plunging on with her confession*)

Aye, lad, I did, I'd been so unhappy with the quarrelin' an' hard words. I could think of nothin' but gettin' rid of them.

VAVASOUR (*in a tone of condemnation and standing over her*)

That was bad, very bad indeed!

CATHERINE

An' then, lad, when I reached the church corner an' saw your spirit was really there, *really* called, an' I knew ye'd not live the year out, I was frightened, but uch! lad, I was glad, I was indeed.

VAVASOUR (*looking grave*)

Catherine, 'twas a terrible thing to do!

CATHERINE (*meekly*)

Yiss, I know it now, but I didn't then. I was hard-hearted, an' I was weak with longin' to escape from it all. An' when I ran home I was frightened, but uch! lad, I was glad, too, an' now it hurts me so to think of it. Can you no comfort me?

VAVASOUR (*grudgingly, but not touching Catherine's outstretched hand*)

Aye, well, I could, but Kats, 'twas such a terrible thing to do!

CATHERINE

Yiss, yiss, ye'll never be able to forgive me, I'm thinkin'. An' then when ye came in from the lodge, ye spoke so pleasantly to me that I was troubled. An' now the year through it has grown better an' better, an' I could think of nothin' but lovin' ye, an' wishin' ye to live, an' knowin' I was the cause of your bein' called. Uch, lad, *can* ye forgive me?

VAVASOUR (*slowly*)

Aye, I can, none of us is without sin; but, Catherine, it was wrong, aye, aye, 'twas a wicked thing for a woman to do.

CATHERINE (*still more meekly*)

An' then to-night, lad, I was expectin' ye to go, knowin' ye couldn't live after twelve, an' ye sittin' there so innocent an' mournful. An' when the time came, I wanted to die myself. Uch!

VAVASOUR (*sitting down beside her and putting an arm about her as he speaks in a superior tone of voice*)

No matter, dearie, now. It *was* wrong in ye, but

we're still here, an' it's been a sweet year, yiss, better nor a honeymoon, an' all the years after we'll make better nor this. There, there, Kats, let's have a bit of a wassail to celebrate our Allhallow's honeymoon, shall we?

CATHERINE (*starting to fetch a bowl*)

Yiss, lad, 'twould be fine, but Vavasour, can ye forgive me, think, lad, for hopin', aye, an' prayin' to see your spirit called, just wishin' that ye'd not live the year out?

VAVASOUR (*with condescension*)

Kats, I can, an' I'm not layin' it up against ye, though 'twas a wicked thing for ye to do — for any one to do. Now, darlin', fetch the bowl.

CATHERINE (*starting for the bowl again but turning on him*)

Vavasour, how does it happen that the callin' is set aside, an' that ye're really here? Such a thing has not been in Beddgelert in the memory of man.

VAVASOUR (*with dignity*)

I'm not sayin' how it's happened, Kats, but I'm thinkin' 'tis modern times whatever, an' things have changed — aye, indeed, 'tis modern times.

CATHERINE (*sighing contentedly*)

Good! 'Tis lucky 'tis modern times whatever!

CURTAIN

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